



## Kirtland prairie dogs get new homes

**BY R. STEVE MILLIGAN**  
377th Air Base Wing Public Affairs

With housing privatization now a reality, new homes will soon be popping up on Kirtland AFB. This means old housing will be torn down and the areas cleared.



Photo by Valerie Butler

Stephen Cox, a Department of Energy employee, who volunteered to help with the project, holds and dries one of the prairie dogs to be moved after capturing it.

This presents a dilemma for the Gunnison Prairie Dogs living in these areas. Eviction notices are out of the question.

Gunnison Prairie Dogs are not protected or endangered but do provide an important element in the ecosystem of Kirtland AFB. One important factor is that their burrows provide nest-

ing areas for the Burrowing Owl, a protected species under the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

To protect the prairie dogs from being overrun by progress, the Environmental Management Branch of the 377th Mission Support Group, Civil Engineer Division, established a plan to move the prairie dogs.

Contract wildlife biologist Carol Finley of Envirollogical Services, LLC, has done work on Kirtland AFB for years with our natural resources management program, tracking, tagging and monitoring our Burrowing Owl population.

Finley was able to partner with two biologists from the U.S. Department of Energy who have experience with trapping live mammals and several volunteers from Environmental Management to help move the prairie dogs to their new location. Chugach Management Services, Joint Venture, also provided help in the form of a water tanker.

A method known as flushing was used to get the prairie dogs out of their current burrows. Soapy water was put into the holes, creating a large volume of suds and driving the animals out into the waiting and welcoming arms of the volunteers. The wet critters were cleaned and their fur was trimmed for identification marking.

Finley's research revealed the best way to ensure the prairie dogs would stay in their new burrows was to put a cage around the new home and feed, water and monitor them for five days. In addition to marking the animals by trimming their fur, the new burrows were also flagged for easy identification after the cages were removed.

"There is always a possibility of losing one or two in the flushing process but consider the alternative," said Cynthia Gooch, chief of the Quality section of Environmental Management. "You try to save them all or they all die when the bulldozers come through."

Careful attention and priority is also given to ensure there are no Burrowing Owls nesting in the areas where construction will take place.

Similar prairie dog moves will take place in the future as needed, according to Gooch.

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**WEATHER**

**TODAY**  
High 76  
Low 46

**TOMORROW**  
High 77  
Low 48

**SUNDAY**  
High 75  
Low 48

**17**  
days until the  
377 th ABW  
NSI

**The Truman Gate**  
will be closed  
tomorrow, 11  
a.m.-3 p.m.

**Force Protection Condition**  
**BRAVO**

## Last chance for base housing lease-signings

All basing housing residents must have a lease signed and on file along with allotments with EPT Management by April 30. Kirtland Family Housing office 7680 Ridgecrest in Zia Park has walk-in appointments 8 a.m.-6 p.m. for current base housing residents today, tomorrow and April 28-30. Wait time is five minutes. Call 232-2049 for questions.



Photo by Damian J. Bohannon

Staff Sgt. Paul Hart of the 898th Munitions Squadron and wife Joanne Hart visit the Family Housing Office to sign their lease.